

**Testimony of Ambassador James F. Dobbins  
Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan  
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
July 11, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the progress of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

Although I have been in my current position for less than two months, I did briefly occupy a similar position nearly twelve years ago, when, in the aftermath of 9/11, I was appointed the Bush Administration's first special envoy for Afghanistan. In that capacity I represented the United States in the early diplomacy after 9/11 which led to the Bonn Conference and the establishment of an interim government in Afghanistan. The Bonn Conference set in motion the political process that produced a new constitution for Afghanistan and its first democratically elected government.

Afghanistan is a remarkably changed place in 2013 as compared to 2001. In 2001, fewer than 900,000 children – almost all boys – were in school. Today, that number is eight million, more than one-third of whom are girls. Life expectancy has soared from 44 years in 2001 to over 60 today. While maternal mortality rates remain too high in Afghanistan, women and children are far more likely to survive childbirth than they were 11 years ago. In 2001, Afghanistan had one state-run television station. Today, the media landscape is among the region's freest and most vibrant, with over 45 percent of Afghans owning televisions and 75 television stations and 175 radio stations available. Afghans are more connected than ever with more than 18 million active cell phone subscribers and a combined phone network that covers 90 percent of the population. Remarkably, 80 percent of Afghan women have access to a cell phone today.

To understand the significance of these types of changes, it is useful to put them in a broader perspective. A study I published with colleagues at the RAND Corporation just before taking this position looked at the 20 major post-Cold War civil-military interventions conducted by the United States, the United Nations, and others in conflict and post-conflict states. The study compared outcomes in those countries over the ten years after each intervention. We found that Afghanistan – even though it was one of only four of the 20 countries still experiencing violent conflict – had by far the greatest improvement of all 20 in its Human Development Index score (measured by the United Nations Development

Program), the second greatest cumulative growth in per capita gross domestic product (based on International Monetary Fund data), and the third best improvement in its government effectiveness score (measured by the World Bank).

The Human Development Index is an especially useful indicator of Afghanistan's advancement. It is a composite measure of socio-economic well-being that takes account of health, education, and income. Since 2001, Afghanistan's Human Development Index score has improved faster than the world average, the South Asia regional average, and the average for countries with low human development. These objective advancements in Afghanistan cannot be explained simply by the low base from which progress has been made since 2001. Several of the other 20 countries we studied were poorer to begin with and improved less rapidly over ten years after intervention. Nor are these improvements just a manifestation of international aid, as Afghanistan was not the largest foreign aid recipient of the 20 countries on a per capita basis. These changes are real and can be expected to be durable.

Afghanistan is still, of course, a poor country, and one that has suffered decades of conflict; it has a long way yet to go in its political and economic development. No society, whether it has been affected by conflict or not, can be lifted out of poverty, cleansed of corruption, and endowed with fully effective and resilient institutions in the short span of a decade. This is why it is most useful to assess progress against a realistic set of expectations.

In this light, the outcomes produced by American, Afghan, and coalition efforts have been impressive, and color the prospects for Afghanistan's future in many ways. Crucially, the people of Afghanistan now have a strong interest in seeing the improvements in their country sustained and even further advanced. Hopes and expectations have risen for peace, for economic development, and for what the government delivers to the people. Afghanistan will not return to the conditions of 2001 as the U.S. role shifts in line with the transition processes and shifts in the security realm to supporting and assisting the Afghans.

I am pleased to once again be working to advance U.S. efforts in a now vastly changed Afghanistan. This is a pivotal time: NATO and the United States are transitioning from a combat to an advisory and assistance role in Afghanistan; Afghan authorities are assuming responsibility for their country's security; and, most importantly for Afghanistan's future stability, next year's presidential election presents an opportunity for the first transfer of power from one freely elected government to another in the country's history.

Fifteen months ago, speaking at Bagram Air Base, President Obama discussed the five lines of effort that underpin U.S. policy in Afghanistan, all of which we continue to pursue: 1) successfully implementing the 2014 security, economic, and political transition; 2) strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces; 3) building a strong partnership with Afghanistan; 4) supporting an Afghan peace process; and 5) enhancing regional cooperation. The steady commitment of the United States, and the sacrifices the American people have made in lives and treasure, have resulted in progress in Afghanistan that is both significant and likely to endure.

Against this backdrop our partnership with Afghanistan has continued to mature. The U.S. is committed to continuing to support a fully sovereign, democratic and united Afghanistan. We have been clear in public and in private, as have many of our allies and partners in ISAF and in the broader international community, that we do not intend to repeat the mistakes of the 1980s and 1990s and that as the Afghans stand up, they won't stand alone. Through our Strategic Partnership Agreement, our robust civilian assistance within the mutual accountability framework, and our support to the ANSF, we remain committed to a long-term strategic partnership with the Afghan government and the Afghan people.

As the President said in January with President Karzai, the U.S. has two goals: Number one, to train, assist, and advise Afghan forces so that they can maintain their own security; and number two, making sure that we can continue to go after remnants of al Qaeda or other affiliates that might threaten our homeland. That is a very limited mission, and it is not one that would require the same kind of footprint, obviously, that we've had over the last 10 years in Afghanistan.

At the NATO Defense Ministers meeting on 5 June, NATO allies and partners endorsed a detailed concept of the new mission for Afghanistan after 2014.

With respect to troop numbers, the President is still reviewing a range of options from his national security team and has not made a decision about the size of a U.S. military presence after 2014.

We are continuing our conversations with the Afghans on how we can carry out those missions and have made significant progress on the text of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). Before the suspension of the last round of negotiations by President Karzai, we felt we were nearing the completion of the technical aspects in the BSA and were very pleased with the productive

negotiations to develop an agreement that served both countries' interest. Since the suspension, we continue to make clear that we remain prepared to negotiate and conclude the BSA. Of course without such an agreement, there could be no such presence, but we do not believe that the likely outcome of these negotiations.

To bolster our partnership, over the past two years we have undertaken an active diplomatic campaign to rally regional and international support for Afghanistan through what we call the Transformation Decade after 2014. From Lisbon to Bonn to Chicago to Tokyo, the international community, together with Afghanistan, has built a framework that will help support Afghanistan through this formative period. A year ago, we agreed at Tokyo to put the relationship between Afghanistan and its partners on a foundation of mutual accountability; to pursue continued political, economic, and social development; and to support a secure, stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan.

The Afghan government and donors met in Kabul last week for frank conversations focused on priority actions that were specified in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and that are required to achieve our shared goals. These actions include ensuring inclusive, transparent, and credible presidential and provincial council elections next year; respecting and upholding human rights commitments, especially maintaining and improving the rights of women; combating corruption; transitioning from a donor-driven to private sector-led economy; improving governance; and ensuring continued development.

We know that Afghanistan takes seriously the reform commitments made in Tokyo last year. These Tokyo commitments reflect Afghanistan's sincere desire to achieve self-sufficiency and economic sovereignty. In Kabul last week, we urged the Afghan government to continue to press for the legislation and regulations required to strengthen electoral institutions, combat corruption, and facilitate economic growth. We also discussed the need to further improve the way international assistance is delivered. As part of our broader effort to enhance Afghan capacity and increase Afghan accountability, we continue to work hard with our Afghan partners to increase the amount of direct assistance provided through the Afghan government. This decision reflects our bilateral commitments to align our programming with Afghan priorities as well as our strategic desire to strengthen the Afghan state and promote Afghanistan's sustainable development.

At the same time, in order to further encourage the Afghan government to meet agreed goals, the United States announced on July 3 the establishment of a new \$175 million bilateral incentive program to encourage progress on the full range of

Tokyo reforms. The United States plans to set aside up to \$75 million in incentive funding available this year, and up to an additional \$100 million of planned funding available next year. The new program will promote Afghan reform progress with flexible funding to be used for development projects or other needs prioritized by the Afghan Government. But the funds will only be available if specific and concrete progress is made toward the Tokyo goals, including on elections, anti-corruption, and women's rights. We look forward to further discussions with the Afghan government on how we can best implement this new incentive program to promote the reforms, which we agree are critical to Afghanistan's future.

Over the last year the United States has re-oriented its civilian assistance programs to better support Afghan needs during the upcoming transitions and to maximize sustainability. The revised program being put in place now focuses on maintaining the social gains of the last decade (focusing on health, education, and women's rights), building the civilian capacity of the Afghan government, and mitigating the negative economic impact of troop withdrawal. The new strategy takes into account input from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction and other inspectors general, and will consolidate programming along key economic corridors, phase out stabilization programs, decrease spending on new infrastructure, and focus on building capacity to maintain prior investments. While new spending in the infrastructure sector will focus on commercializing existing services and building Afghan capacity to maintain and operate existing infrastructure, we will continue to support completion of existing projects proposed under the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF). The AIF will not be used to support new projects that would further increase the future financial burden on the Afghan Government. The Department of State, USAID and DoD are working closely together to ensure that Afghan ministries have the necessary capacity and authorities to sustainably maintain these investments in the future.

While our bilateral assistance is an important part of our economic relationship, we have also endeavored to promote economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors. We believe that the best way to enable the Afghan people to achieve sustained economic progress beyond 2014 is to enable this increased regional connectivity – to help the countries of the region dismantle trade barriers, promote investment, and support the development of regional energy, transportation, and communications links. This is at the very heart of the New Silk Road vision. Our support for the Istanbul Process, in particular, promotes a regionally led effort to build trust and regional leadership post-2014.

My colleague Peter Lavoy will speak in more detail about the progress we and our Afghan partners have made in developing the Afghan National Security Forces over the past two years and what we are doing together to ensure continued progress, but I want to highlight a few important points on these issues.

We are in the final stages of transition to Afghan lead for security, realizing commitments that we, our allies, and Afghanistan made at Lisbon in 2010 and reaffirmed at Chicago last year. On June 18, we marked the milestone of transition to full Afghan lead for security and ISAF's shift from combat operations to support of the Afghan National Security Forces. In concert with reaching the milestone, President Karzai announced the fifth and final stage of transition to full Afghan lead on security throughout the country, which will begin later this summer and put us on track to complete a process begun two years ago. While the Taliban remain capable of staging dramatic attacks, Afghan forces are demonstrating their growing capabilities during this fighting season, taking on the Taliban across Afghanistan even as ISAF forces gradually leave the field. But as our forces pull back, we remain committed to ensuring that the ANSF is as strong as it can be. We continue to train ANSF units and improve the capacity of the security ministries, a mission that will last beyond 2014 as part of NATO's longer-term train, advise, and assist plans. And as we work with the Afghans to build a stronger ANSF, we will also partner with them on our post-2014 counterterrorism mission that will prevent al-Qaida from again using Afghanistan as a safe haven.

While helping the Afghans take responsibility for their own security, we are also working to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process designed to find a political solution to conflict with the Taliban. To that end, in January, President Obama and President Karzai called for the establishment of an office in Doha for the purpose of enabling negotiations between the Afghan High Peace Council and authorized representatives of the Taliban. We appreciate the efforts of the Government of Qatar to encourage this process, and the public statements of support from the international community, including Pakistan and others. We are appreciative of Pakistan's efforts to further Afghan-led reconciliation, including Pakistan's call to Taliban leaders and insurgents to join talks with the High Peace Council. We continue to encourage consultations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments in support of reconciliation efforts.

Talking peace means talking to your enemy. The first steps are always hard, and a final settlement may be a long time coming. Our goal remains for Afghans to be talking to Afghans about how they can move forward, end the violence, and continue rebuilding their country. From the start, we have made clear that, as part

of any outcome, the Taliban and other insurgent groups must end violence, break ties with international terrorism, and accept the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities. We have also made clear that while the United States will try to help facilitate a peace process, negotiations about the future of Afghanistan must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

We will continue to work to promote a peace process, but this cannot distract from the main priority in the coming year – the political transition that will occur when the Afghan people choose a new President next April. I cannot stress enough the importance of a successful and democratic political transition next year and, as an essential part of that, a credible and timely election process that reflects the will of the Afghan people. Next April's election will be a momentous occasion in Afghanistan's national history. The future stability of Afghanistan rests on a peaceful transition of political authority from President Karzai to his successor in 2014 through an election that Afghans themselves accept as credible. Afghans know that inclusive elections are critical to their country's stability, as well as to sustaining international commitments to Afghanistan.

The first steps in the process have already been taken. We urge the Afghan government and Parliament to take the next critical steps and pass electoral legislation that provides for appointments of electoral officials and an independent complaints process, and for President Karzai to sign them into law, as he has promised to do, in order to ensure the credibility of the elections processes. A successful and unifying political transition based on a transparent, inclusive, free and fair election will reaffirm to the Afghan people and the international community that Afghanistan's commitment to democracy, peace, and prosperity remains strong and unwavering.

The Afghans have already taken significant steps to prepare for this historic process. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has created a timeline for the elections, designed a public education campaign for voters, and developed a comprehensive operational plan to combat fraud and expand participation, including of women. Political leaders have been meeting to clarify a common understanding of how elections should be conducted, who should run and on what platform, and how to ensure that influential political factions respect the result. It is encouraging that Afghans understand that nothing will strengthen Afghanistan more than an election that serves to unify their country. I want to reaffirm that the United States will not endorse any single party or candidate. However, we along with the international community will be paying close attention to the election process as it unfolds. We will continue to encourage all political figures to play a

positive and unifying role, irrespective of their differences, to help ensure a transparent, peaceful, and democratic political process that fulfills the aspirations of Afghans. The Afghan people deserve nothing less given their sacrifices over the past three decades.

We are providing significant financial and program assistance to help Afghans build credible and independent electoral institutions. In doing so, we emphasize the importance of expanding voter participation, particularly for women, and of ensuring the independence of the election commission, as well as the need for an independent complaints commission and consultative procedures for selecting commissioners. We are engaging intensively with Afghan officials, civil society, and political leaders to support their efforts to establish effective elections processes. We also are coordinating closely with the UN and with other donors on training, public information campaigns, fraud mitigation, domestic observation efforts, and improved ways to identify eligible voters.

The U.S. government provided \$179 million in assistance for 2009-2013 for programs focusing on effective voter registration, civic and voter education, electoral reform and legislation, and expanding political participation. For the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections, USAID plans to contribute an additional \$110 million. Of this amount, about \$75 million directly supports the UNDP-ELECT project working with the two main Afghan electoral bodies, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). An additional \$15-20 million has been budgeted to assist civil society actors that are stakeholders in the democratic process (e.g., women's groups, media, youth, political party capacity building, and election observers). For the 2015 parliamentary election USAID is budgeting additional funding for democratic stakeholders that has yet to be determined.

Afghanistan has made impressive progress since 2001. Afghanistan is freer and more prosperous, people are better educated, healthier, and enjoy much greater economic opportunity. Like any developing country emerging from conflict, Afghanistan will require international support for some time, but Afghans are determined to stand up. A country that a little more than a decade ago provided the haven from which the 9/11 attacks were planned has become a staunch partner against international terrorism. There is much the Afghan people can be proud of, and we can be proud to stand at their side, working together to ensure that these tremendous accomplishments are not reversed.



Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I look forward to your questions.